

Linda Clair
Five-day Meditation Retreat
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Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 4b – Tuesday morning discussion session

Linda: Any questions?

Question: I've spent most of this morning trying to sit up straight. Literally the whole sit feeling myself out of line and over, and then you came and straightened me up. Is it ever going to end?

Linda: Everybody bends over at some time; I bend over at times. It just makes you much more aware of your body. If I come and adjust you don't feel like you're doing something wrong – it's not wrong. And no, it's never going to end because your body is not perfect. It's not always going to be sitting up straight – nobody's does. Just if you realise it, just straighten gently up. There is no perfect anything. So it's all a work in process, you're always doing it. I'm still doing certain things; I'm probably leaning sometimes doing this – I just straighten up.

Question: Do you think perhaps I'm a bit too fussy?

Linda: Yes! (Laughter) You're a bit too hard on yourself.

But you do need to get up a bit more during the walking. That will wake you up and energise you.

How are you going P.? Are you using that technique we were talking about?

Question: No, I'm not. Your comments were extremely helpful to me and I felt slightly liberated after doing that. But the problem for me has been, you say get in contact with the body and stay with the belly, and I go, "Where is the belly?" I mean I taught anatomy for twenty years, I should know. I trace it back and know exactly why, due to dissociation from very early childhood through abuse, and shaming and humiliation. And I thought I'd got rid of most of that dissociation but I haven't. I found this morning that when I looked at that and saw that, I became really upset about it but I actually managed to reattach – to some extent, I'm not finished with it. But the process of working with the body – because I was taught, I was brought up in a Catholic tradition where the body was an enemy. It's an old, old heresy: there was either the spiritual, which was good, or the profane which included the body, which was bad. And so you mortified the body, you felt ashamed about the body. And that conditioning fitted in with that dissociation that I took on as a very, very small child because of unfortunate incidents. And I guess it's taken me this long, and it's a fair while as you can observe, to get to a point where I'm beginning to re-associate. But I realise it makes me feel really needy at times. This loss of contact, in certain circumstances like here, it makes me feel really clumsy and looking for reassurance and sticky, and probably awkward to have me around for some people. So I have become aware of that.

And the only other thing that I would say this morning is a Haiku that I came across and it stuck with me: *Even when I am in Kyoto, I long for Kyoto.*

Linda: Yeah, I love that one too. It's one of my favourites.

Question: Even when I'm in the body, I long for the body.

Linda: You know that one too. So, let me reassure you're doing the right thing. It's never too late. I doubt you're bothering anyone.

Question: That's part of the neediness, is looking for things and then not getting them. I've worked in various areas including psychology as well. So I am aware of these things in other people, but then I suddenly discover what I don't like in other people happening in me. So I'm hoping to be able to deal with that, plus other things as well.

Linda: Well, I can say after this a lot will happen. A lot is happening now but you will realise much more after this. The fear of going into the body is in everyone to some degree. Because everyone has felt, whether they have been abused or not, has felt that shame, that inadequacy, "I can't do anything right – it's all wrong." So there is a resistance to going into the body and it can be really difficult. So when you feel you can't feel your belly actually put your hand on it, for a while, and just leave it on there and breathe and feel it breathing. Just to reassure yourself and make it a bit more tangible and a bit more real. So do that if you have trouble finding it. And I often suggest that to people because people often feel that same way – they have trouble feeling the belly.

Your age is irrelevant in a way. There's nothing worse than hearing someone say, "This is going to stay with me forever, I'm going to hang on to this forever," when something traumatic happens in their life. It doesn't have to be like that! And that's what you're seeing. Once you've realised it doesn't matter how much longer you live because then you're here, you're now. You've realised now. The time is really not that important. So it doesn't matter if you realise a few days before you die. It's worth it. To realise this before you actually die is the most amazing thing while you're still in the body. So then the length of time that you're in your body isn't so relevant.

Question: Well I have had the thought many times that before I die I want one moment of clarity. Is the feeling I've had for years, but how to get there? I guess this is the process.

Linda: Well, in my experience this is the process. It's hard for everyone in different ways. So try not to single yourself out, which we all tend to do, and go, "It's harder for me than for anyone else," because it's not.

And that's what you realise in the end, "I'm just one, I'm not this special human being. I'm not different, I'm the same as everyone." We're all human beings. Individuals, but you stop trying to be special in whatever way you see yourself, or I used to see myself, or want to be special. That goes, and it's such a relief. And then you can let go of all that past, that trauma, which is in everyone to a degree.

Question: I've got a bit of an abstract question. About a couple of months ago I had an insight while I was going for a walk. I wasn't in a good place mentally, but I had a feeling that my awareness is emptiness, it's not something but it's not nothing. And I could feel that in the surroundings around

me, like an emptiness where everything is coming up from. So there was a sense of coherence with that nothingness or just existence. But I'm a very heady person so I'm very much in my head a lot and I knew that feeling needed to be in the body. That's one of the reasons I came to the retreat. And as I was sitting with the breathing, it still feels like it's *my* body here, I'm sitting in my body. So I wanted to reconcile that insight with the breathing. And the only way I could reconcile that without any thinking is to feel that body is just happening, the breath is just happening, as opposed to "my breath." Is that...?

Linda: Are you asking if that's a good thing to do? Yes, so feel your body. And of course, it's your body and you're walking around in your body, but the breath is a good thing because you do go, "Well, is it my breath? It's my body breathing but where does this breath come from?" I used to look at that and it was almost like it's everyone's breath. It's everywhere; it's everyone's breath. At times it felt like this universal breath that was coming in and going out.

So I would say, yeah, do that. Make it as neutral as possible without it starting to get spacy. As soon as you start to feel a bit spacy really come back very strongly into the belly. But I suppose you could say dis-identify with it as much as possible. It's this body breathing; it's this breath breathing. But if you start to float away come back. That can happen when you do that. And it's good you had that realisation that brought you here.

Question: Yeah, I just felt that it needed to be embodied. And I've realised since that being in the body, I realise the resistance is a fear of the unknown for me. Like thinking, even my fear is a security, so in some sense it's a sense of security there. So coming into the body, that sense of uncertainty just being in the body of, "What's going to happen next? I need to think about the future." I'm sort of leaning into that a bit more, but it's a slow sort of process.

Linda: It is, it's a gradual process and it needs to be because your deepest fear is of the unknown, and the greatest unknown is death. And as R. said, as he was approaching death there was no fear. You can say that but actually you need to experience it yourself, otherwise you just can't believe it. The mind just can't believe that. The question that A. asked the other day was really good – "Can you get a taste of enlightenment, or something like that, before?" You really can't because once you're fully here there's no going back. It is like death. Death people see as the final thing, once you're dead – and once someone close to you dies you realise that, "Oh, they can't come back, that's it. They've gone." It's the same with enlightenment and that's why there is so much fear around it because there is this sense and this knowing in you that it is very final. So you can't have a taste of it and come back. It's a bit like a near-death experience is not the same as death. So you can't have a near-enlightenment, a near-enlightenment experience is not the same as enlightenment. Because when it's permanent – and by permanent I mean you can't go back – it's very, very different.

That's what makes it enlightenment, that's what makes it realisation. You go so far beyond the mind that there is really never any going back. And you're awake all the time, and you can't go to sleep again. There is a lot more that happens but you just can't go to sleep again. So you can't go back to how you were, and that's where the fear comes from. There's this sense in you, and the mind senses that and knows that, and that's why it's no scary because there is no coming back – it's a sort of a death. And you don't want to go back, but before that, just as there's this deep fear of death and the unknown – once you're there, there is no fear – and it's the same with enlightenment.

People are very scared about how they're going to be when they're realised, "I won't be able to function, do this or that." But it's a state of no fear, so it's just crazy when you look at it like that. There is this fear, as you were saying, of having no fear because we're so attached to our fear. We love our fear, it keeps us separate, makes us special. Eventually the unknown becomes so exciting you don't want to know anything, almost anything, because the unknown is just so intensely exciting. So learning to live in that place while in the body is a tricky process, is a difficult thing. And that leads to another deeper realisation of the relative and the absolute. But the first step is realizing your own mortality and accepting your own mortality, and the fear of your mortality going.

Question: I've been feeling what I feel in every retreat, where I get that sense of failure and I sort of feel like a fraud in a way. Like, I'm dedicated to this and want to do that, but in sits where it's not that painful I have so much fear and everything going on and I'll get up; just different things through the day, not constantly. When I hear you talking about how much you have to want it and, "You need to be more and more determined," at times I really get the feeling I won't be able to ever have that.

Linda: I'd say everyone, I was the same, everyone has that. And the reason you're doing this is that you do feel like a fraud, and I remember feeling that very, very strongly. So like I said yesterday it's not a sprint, it's a long-distance endurance test, race, whatever you want to call it. A race to do it before your body karks it. 😊 So you will go through periods like this in a retreat, it's quite normal. Everyone does have their days where they feel, "It's just hopeless, I'm hopeless." And part of it is tiredness – you get tired doing this, it's really a tiring thing to do, whatever age you are, however extremely fit you are. This energy that you use for this is something completely different to that. It's this incredible energy that comes from a different dimension. It's totally different to pure physical energy. So you will get tired. I can just reassure you that you're doing the right thing. It is possible. You're going to feel like this – just keep going. Everyone feels like this at certain stages. Just keep going, and I know you will, you've got no choice. You will keep going. You just think you that you've got the choice but you don't really.

There was a time when everything that came out of my mouth just felt like pure rubbish. I just shut up because it wasn't worth saying anything. But that changes, it does change. I do get sick of hearing myself talk sometimes though.

Question: I've had quite an intense experience, like other people, and I'm starting to be okay with that intensity. But what I've noticed is when I allow myself to just be okay that there's thoughts, there's this energy, and it absolutely terrifies me. And it has no story line. I've felt it in other retreats but not so potently as here. One of my last sits it was almost physical, really wanting to get away from it and feeling like it's going to overwhelm me. Doesn't really have any story line to it or anything like that.

Linda: So, the resistance can become so strong that it feels like it's almost literally picking you up and taking you out of the room. It takes a lot just to stay here. So when that happens it is overwhelming, it's incredibly overwhelming and intense, but the main thing is to just stay here. It doesn't matter what's happening within that. The main thing at times, well most of the time, all the time, is just to stay here. So yeah, it's the energy of being here and then your mind going, "No, get out of here, this is dangerous." And it is dangerous for the mind, it's the end of thinking and the mind can't exist now, here. So when it senses that you're serious it will use anything it can to stop you doing this, and sometimes it will be something that feels almost like an entity. And that's how it

feels – it's scary, it's like this entity in your body trying to get you away. And it will come and go, but just staying here is the way to be free from it. Don't fight it. You'll feel that fear – keep breathing, keep breathing just to stabilize yourself, just to be as stable as you can. And this will come and go, and then something else will happen, some other form of resistance will come up. The resistance changes; sometimes it's like that, intensely overwhelming, other times it will become more subtle where you can be going along quite nicely and feeling, "Oh wow, I'm nearly here," and then realise, "Oh, I am a bit deluded in this." So you can't win.

It's not all hard grind. There will be, especially after this, periods of incredible lightness. So it's not that you don't enjoy it but you don't get too carried away by anything. What you're feeling feels very real but it is not real, it's that deep resistance that is trying to stop you doing this. So just keep sitting. It's so important to do that, don't let it put you off. But it will become overwhelming at times. Just breathe, try and breathe a bit more deeply, because it can come in waves, like a huge wave overwhelming you and the breathing will just keep you a bit steady, help you to bear it.

Question: I've noticed during this retreat but especially lately that the more I go into the body the less – I have *no* idea what is going on. I've just trusted in the space of being here with you. But there's a clarity that's coming with that. So I would like some comment on that. I've noticed the deeper in the body, everything seems to be falling away and I have no idea what's going on from moment to moment, and yet I have this sense of lightness maybe, or expansiveness. I just wondered whether it's an issue of trust or acceptance?

Linda: Well, if you're feeling like that, great. The less you know the lighter you'll feel. And what do you need to know? Do you need to know that you're sitting here? Do you need to know what's happening here? There's all this stuff happening in your body right now – do you really need to know what's happening? You don't, you're just here. So when you have that feeling, "I don't know what I'm doing," it's actually a great sign. So don't try and figure out what you're doing or analyse. Just let yourself go as deeply as possible into it. So that's good. And just trust.

Question: I thought this is the safest place for me here so this is my time to experiment with it. I've been going through spaces very quickly and just watching the mind that wants to figure things out. That's all I can do.

Linda: Wants to figure things out, remember things. That desire to remember is very strong and it will come up, and all you want to do at times is remember something. So if you feel that let it go, come back to your body.

Question: I've just been forcing myself to stay in the body as much as possible.

Linda: So do that.

Question: The counting has been more important than I ever gave it credit for. The only thing I get trapped by is when I start counting in my head and think that it's in my belly...

Linda: Sometimes when you're doing something practical – I used to count the pegs when I was hanging out the washing, and I just found it so soothing. It was good to have something to count. It wasn't really so much in the belly. And when you're walking you can count your steps. So it doesn't

always have to be in the belly, particularly when you're not sitting. Doing things – use something to count. It can be good.